

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

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TRSE-00 /083 W

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R 171334Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7557

INFO AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BOGOTA 2411/1

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PFOR CO

SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. PRESIDENT LOPEZ OPENED THE SPECIAL SESSION OF CONGRESS ON MARCH 11 WITH A BRIEF, BUSINESSLIKE ADDRESS. THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE PLACED ONLY THREE ITEMS OF BUSINESS BEFORE THE LEGISLATORS (UNDER COLOMBIAN LAW A SPECIAL SESSION OF CONGRESS MAY ADDRESS ONLY SUCH MATTERS AS THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH REQUESTS). THE CONGRESS, EQUALLY BUSINESSLIKE, QUICKLY ENACTED TWO OF THE THREE ITEMS AND REMAINS AT WORK ON THE THIRD. THE SAGA OF THE CHURCH OPPOSED NOMINEE FOR GOVERNOR OF RISARALDA (BOGOTA 2204) ENDED ON MARCH 10 WHEN THE LADY DEFINITELY SAID "NO" TO THE APPOINTMENT. THE REPLACEMENT NOMINEE, ALBRETO MESA ABADIA, IS NOT EXPECTED TO PROVE AS CONTROVERSIAL AS MRS BOTERO. FORMER PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS DEMONSTRATED AGAIN THAT, DESPITE HIS SIXTY SEVEN YEARS, HE IS A POWERFUL ADVOCATE AND IMPRESSIVE ADVERSARY. HIS ARTICULATE CRITICISM OF SENATE PRESIDENT AND "DESIGNADO" JULIO CESAR TURBAY WILL NOT HELP THE LATTERS 1978 PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS. THE LLERAS SALVO IS PROBABLY THE FIRST OF MANY THAT
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WILL BE DIRECTED AGAINST THE POLITICALLY EFFECTIVE BUT

WIDELY DISLIKED FRONT-RUNNER. END SUMMARY

2. EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF CONGRESS BEGINS UNEVENTFULLY. PRESIDENT LOPEZ CONVOKED THE EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF CONGRESS MARCH 11, WITH A 10-MINUTE SPEECH ADDRESSING ONLY THE THREE SUBJECTS HE WISHED THE CONGRESS TO CONSIDER. THERE HAD BEEN RUMORS THAT HE WOULD MAKE A MAJOR SPEECH ON A "SOCIAL AND INCOMES POLICY". THE SENATE SPEEDILY GAVE UNANIMOUS APPROVAL FOR THE PRESIDENT TO TRAVEL TO PANAMA BEGINNING MARCH 21, AND PASSED A PENAL REFORM LAW, WHICH FOR TECHNICAL REASONS DID NOT HAVE TO BE RECONSIDERED BY THE CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES. THE SENATE ACTION LEFT ONLY ONE MORE ITEM TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE CONGRESS: THE PROPOSED REFORM OF THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S OFFICE. THIS REFORM MEASURE, WHICH WAS PASSED BY THE SENATE DURING THE REGULAR SESSION, WAS BURIED IN COMMITTEE BY THE CHAMBER, PRIMARILY OVER A DISPUTE BETWEEN LIBERAL REPRESENTATIVES NCAS TO WHETHER THE NEXT COMPTROLLER GENERAL SHOULD BE A LIBERAL OR A CONSERVATIVE AS PRESIDENT LOPEZ HAS REPEATEDLY PROMISED (BOGOTA 2185). EMBASSY SOURCES IN THE CHAMBER STATED THAT THIS QUESTION WOULD BE LEFT FOR THE NEXT ORDINARY SESSION BEGINNING JULY 20, 1975, THUS AVOIDING FOR THE TIME BEING A POTENTIALLY THORNY ISSUE. NEVERTHELESS, CHAMBER CONSIDERATION OF THE REFORM MEASURE IS EXPECTED TO CONSUME MOST OF THE 34 DAY EXTRA-ORDINARY SESSION, BECAUSE OF THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE PROPOSAL AND THE CHARGES OF MALFEASANCE BROUGHT AGAINST THE PRESENT COMPTROLLER BY THE ATTORNEY GENERAL. BOTH WILL TESTIFY BEFORE THE COMMITTEE CONSIDERING THE BILL DURING THE NEXT WEEK.

3. GOVERNOR "CRISIS" RESOLVED. FOLLOWING A SEVERAL HOUR MEETING WITH PRESIDENT LOPEZ MARCH 10, DORA LUZ CAMPO DE BOTERO DECIDED NOT TO ACCEPT THE GOVERNORSHIP OF RISARALDA, THUS ENDING THE CHURCH-STATE CONFRONTATION AND PERMITTING LOPEZ TO FREE HIMSELF FROM WHAT SEEMED TO BE DEVELOPING INTO A POLITICAL "HOT POTATO". EARLIER OVER THE WEEKEND, LOPEZ MET WITH THE RISARALDA HIERARCHY, WHO SUBSEQUENTLY ANNOUNCED THAT AS FAR AS THEY WERE CONCERNED SUBSEQUENTLY ANNOUNCED THAT AS FAR AS THEY WERE CONCERNED CONFIDENTIAL

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THE INCIDENT OVER MRS BOTEROS MORAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR GOVERNORSHIP WAS CLOSED. MRS BOTEROS DECISION SEEMED TO INDICATE THAT THE INFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH IN COLOMBIAN POLITICA REMAINS SIGNIFICANT.

4. LOPEZ APPOINTED CONSERVATIVE COFFEE GROWER ALBERTO MESA ABADIA AS GOVERNOR. THE APPOINTMENT OF MESA NOT ONLY BROUGHT PARITY REPRESENTATION BETWEEN LIBERALS

AND CONSERVATIVES BACK INTO LINE, BUT AVOIDED FURTHER LIBERAL TENSIONS IN RISARALDA, FOR THE TIME BEING. THAT DEPARTMENT IS ONE OF THE MOST POLITICALLY FRACTURED AMONG LIBERALS IN COLOMBIA.

6. IN A SURPRISE ANNOUNCEMENT, CUNDINAMARCA GOVERNOR FRANCISCO PIZANO DE BRIGARD (CONSERVATIVE) RESIGNED ON MARCH 10. HE CITED POLITICAL DIFFERENCES WITH THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION AND DIFFERENCES IN CONCEPTS OVER THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND GOVERNORS FOR HIS DECISION, BUT IT MAY HAVE ALSO BEEN INFLUENCED BY WHAT HE CONSIDERED INADEQUATE REASSURANCES FROM LOPEZ AND MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT CORNELIO REYES THAT HE WAS NOT SCHEDULED TO BE REPLACED. LOPEZ NAMED HERNANDO ZULETA HOLGUIN, ALSO A CONSERVATIVE TO REPLACE PIZANO. HOLGUIN IS A 41 YEAR OLD ECONOMIST WHO WAS SERVING AS PIZANO'S SECRETARY OF FINANCE.

7. LLERAS TURBAY POLEMICS SPARKS POLITICAL DEBATE. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FORMER PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS RESTREPO AND SENATE PRESIDENT JULIO CESAR TURBAY AYALA WHICH BROKE OUT PUBLICLY LATE LAST WEEK (BOGOTA 2277) QUITTED DOWN DURING THE PRESENT WEEK, BUT SPARKED WHAT APPEARS TO BE A GROWING DEBATE OVER THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN COLOMBIA. LLERAS ACCOMPANIED HIS PERSONAL ATTACK AGAINST TURBAY, WHICH WAS RETURNED IN KIND, WITH A CALL FOR THE SEPARATION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS. THE DEBATE WITH LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES ALIKE JOINING THE DISCUSSION, SPREAD TO INCLUDE THE MERITS OF A PRIMARY SYSTEM. WHILE THE INTELLECTUAL ANALYSIS AND OPINIONATING SEEMED TO TEMPER THIS PARTICULAR LLERAS-TURBAY DISPUTE, IT APPEARED THAT THE POLITICAL MANEUVERING FOR THE 1978 NOMINATION WAS UNDERWAY.

8. ANAPO-LOOKING TO 1978. THE NATIONAL POPULAR ALLIANCE
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(ANAPO) ANNOUNCED LAST WEEK THAT MARIA EUGENIA ROJAS DE MORENO WOULD BE THE PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IN 1978. THE ANNOUNCEMENT GENERATED LITTLE INTEREST AMONG THE PUBLIC OR PRESS. THE 1974 ELECTORAL DEBACLE (9 PERCENT OF THE VOTE) AND THE DEATH, IN JAN OF THIS YEAR, OF PARTY FOUNDER GENERAL GUSTAVO ROJAS APPEAR TO HAVE SIGNALLED THE END OF ANAPO AS A MAJOR POLITICAL FORCE IN COLOMBIA. MAJOR PARTY POLITICIANS WHO, A YEAR AGO, FOLLOWED ANAPO DEVELOPMENTS CLOSELY, NOW DISMISS THE THIRD PARTY AS A PASSING PHENOMENON OF LITTLE PRESENT SIGNIFICANCE. THE RELATIVELY RAPID RISE AND DECLINE OF ANAPO--IN 1970 GENERAL ROJAS NARROWLY MISSED WINING THE PRESIDENCY--MAY HAVE A LONG-TERM SIGNIFICANCE AS AN INDICATOR THAT A SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THE COLOMBIAN ELECTORATE, DESPITE TRADITIONALLY STRONG PARTY LOYALTIES, WILL FOLLOW

A CHARISMATIC LEADER OR STRONGMAN BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF
THE EXISTING TWO-PARTY SYSTEM.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BOGOTA 2411/2

9. COMMUNIST UNITY LABOR CONGRESS ENDS AS IT BEGAN-DISUNITED.
THE SO-CALLED SECOND UNITY CONGRESS OF THE
TRADE UNION OF COLOMBIAN WORKERS (CSTC) WAS HELD MARCH 4-8,
1975. THE REVOLUTIONARY AND INDEPENDENT WORKERS MOVEMENT
(MOIR) WHICH LAST WEEK ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD DISAUTHORIZE
THE ATTENDANCE OF ITS DELEGATES TO THE CONGRESS (BOGOTA
2204) CARRIED THROUGH WITH ITS THREAT. THE CSTC LEADER-
SHIP, PUTTING THE BEST FACE ON THE SITUATION, DENOUNCED THE
MOIR LEADERS FOR DIVISIONIST TACTICS, DISCOUNTED THE IMPORTANCE OF
THE MOIR DELEGATES TO THE "UNITY THEME" AND
CALLED THE MEETING A SUCCESS. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR
WHETHER THE MOIRS SUBSEQUENT ANNOUNCEMENT THAT ITS
UNIONS WERE DISAFFILIATING FROM THE CSTC WOULD ACTUALLY
RESULT IN THE TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF THE UNIONS, OR ONLY MOIR
AND MOIR INFLUENCED MEMBERS.
NEVERTHELESS, THE DIDIVISON IN THE ONLY RECENTLY UNIFIED
COMMUNIST LABOR RANKS SEEMED TO INDICATE THAT PROBLEMS
BETWEEN VARIOUS COMMUNIST FORCES IN COLOMBIA WILL NOT BE
EASILY OVERCOME, AND SHOULD INTERFERE WITH RECENT ORGANIZ-
ING CAMPAIGNS DIRECTED AT THE DEMOCRATIC LABOR

MOVEMENT. THE CONGRESS RE-ELECTED PASTOR PEREZ AND ROSO
ORSORO AS PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY GENERAL RESPECTIVELY.
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10. TRADE DISCUSSIONS: CUBA SOVIET UNION CEPAL. THOUGH
TRADE PROSPECTS HAVE NEVER BEEN ADVANCED AS A MAJOR REASON
FOR RENEWING RELATIONS WITH CUBA, ANY TRADE POSSIBILITIES
OPENED UP BY RENEWAL WILL BE WELCOME. THE DIRECTOR OF
THE FOREIGN TRADE INSTITUTE LISTED PRODUCTS THAT MIGHT
BE EXPORTED TO CUBA, EMPHASIZING CONTRACS ALREADY MADE TO
SELL CUBA SOME OF THE RICE THAT COLOMBIA HAS HAD DIFFICULTY
SELLING (BOGOTA 2225). A BARRANQUILLA FIRM
ANNOUNCED IT HAS SOLD 60,000 TONS OF CEMENT TO CUBA,
AND THE NATIONAL INDUSTRIALISTS ASSOCIATION IS ORGANIZING
A TRADE MISSION THE CUBAN DELEGATION TO THE ECLA
MEETING IN BOGOTA IS HEADED NOT BY
VICE PRIME MINISTER RODRIGUEZ AS ADVERTISED BUT BY HIS
"ADVISER", OSCAR PINO SANTOS, WHO CALLED ON THE FOREIGN
MINISTER BUT APPARENTLY HAS NOT DISCUSSED BILATERAL
COMMERCIAL MATTERS WITH THE COLOMBIANS. THE MOST DISTURBING
DEVELOPMENT INVOLVING COMMERCE WAS THE ANNOUNCEMENT
BY THE GOC SHIPPING LINE THAT IT WILL RESUME SERVICE TO
CUBA SOON. IF THIS OCCURS, IT WILL RUN AFOUL OF
PROVISIONS IN THE US FOREIGN ASSISTANCE ACT.

11. IN ADDITION TO THE INTEREST IN TRADE RELATIONS
WITH CUBA, DISCUSSION OF TRADE PROSPECTS HAS BEEN STIMULATED
BY THE PRESENCE OF A SOVIET COMMERCIAL MISSION AND THE
MEETING IN BOGOTA OF CEPAL. THE SOVIETS ARE APPARENTLY
INTERESTED IN A NEW BARTER AGREEMENT IN WHICH THEY WOULD
SUPPLY HYDROELECTRIC EQUIPMENT IN EXCHANGE FOR COFFEE AND
TEXTILES. WHILE DISCUSSIONS HAVE BEEN HELD WITH A NUMBER OF
ENERGY OFFICIALS, THUS FAR IT APPEARS THAT THE
GOC HAS SHOWN LITTLE INTEREST IN SOVIET EQUIPMENT. THE
CEPAL MEETING OF EXPERTS IS ANALYZING THE
POSSIBILITY OF DEVELOPING A NEW REGIONAL ECONOMIC
STRATEGY BASED PRIMARILY ON GREATER PRODUCTION OF
CAPITAL GOODS AND INCREASED REGIONAL TRADE. WHILE
THE FINAL REPORT OF THE MEETING WILL NOT BE MADE UNTIL
MARCH 15, LITTLE OF SUBSTANCE APPEARS TO BE RESULTING
FROM THE CONFERENCE.
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